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AUTHOR	Dumville, Miriam McCarthy
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ABSTRACT

Although standard courses in psychology are offered each academic year at New Jersey's Raritan Valley Community College (RVCC), the psychology of women and gender has yet to be incorporated into the curriculum. The psychology of women developed with the emergence of the second wave of feminism, beginning with a critical analysis of psychology's study and treatment of women. Psychology's views on women were generally negative, and feminist criticism of it has focused on several theoretical and methodological biases related to the use of men as a norm and women as deviations and the invisibility of topics relevant to women's lives. A review of textbooks widely used to teach the psychology of women indicates that they share various themes that distinguish them from traditional psychological research. The feminist psychology approach values women and provides contextual validity to their lives, viewing gender as a lens through which each person experiences her world and examining the processes through which gender is constructed. At RVCC, a course has been developed for fall 1997 to incorporate this new research and critical analysis into the curriculum. A chart illustrating the incorporation of feminist psychology into the curriculum, a description of stages at which biases can influence the research process, and an outline of the Psychology of Women and Gender course are appended. (HAA)

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The Psychology of Women and Gender

Miriam M. Dumville

Issues of Education at Community Colleges: Essays by Fellows in the Mid-Career Fellowship Program at Princeton University

JC 970 405

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The Psychology of Women and Gender

Miriam McCarthy Dumville
Raritan Valley Community College

Mid-Career Fellowship Program
May, 1997

Curriculum offerings at any college need to reviewed periodically to determine if the academic goals of the institution are being met. Likewise, individual departments must examine offerings in each discipline to determine if courses are current, reflect the body of work that comprises that discipline, and satisfy students needs in a changing world. As new areas in a discipline evolve, colleges must ensure that course offerings reflect and embrace development and change. At Raritan Valley Community College, standard courses in psychology are offered each academic year including Introduction to Psychology, Abnormal Psychology, Social Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Theories of Personality and Community Psychology. These courses are traditional and are offered at most colleges and universities across the nation. As a result, these courses transfer easily to four-year institutions, which is an important consideration for students and faculty at community colleges.

The psychology of women and gender is an area of research which has yet to be incorporated into the curriculum at RVCC. The psychology of women traces its roots to the traditional field of psychology known as differential psychology (Hyde, 1996). However, since the 1970's, the psychology of women (also known as feminist psychology) has blossomed into a separate discipline within psychology, with its own perspective, topics of interest and methods of research. Courses in the psychology of women are now commonplace. A recent survey of 503 undergraduate psychology departments found that 51% listed courses in the psychology of women (Women's Programs Office, 1991 as cited by Unger & Crawford, 1996).

A Brief History of the Psychology of Women

All psychology and science develops within a social and cultural context (Unger & Crawford, 1996) and the psychology of women developed simultaneously with the emergence of the second wave of feminism. The psychology of women began with a critical analysis of psychology's study and treatment of women. This analysis uncovered several biases against women within traditional psychology. Psychology's views on women were generally negative (Hyde, 1996) as can be seen in the writings of G.Stanley Hall, the founder of the American Psychological Association.

> (Academic specialization) is more liable to be developed at the expense of reproductive power, for the two, beyond a certain very variable point, become inversely as each other. Woman is so altruistic in her nature that her supreme danger is that she will take out of her system more than it will bear before she knows it, and that over-activity of the brain during the critical period of the middle and later teens will interfere with the full development of mammary power and of the functions essential for the full transmission of life generally (Hall, 1906 as cited by Matlin, 1996).

Feminist criticism of traditional psychology has focused on several different biases. Most early researchers were men (Matlin, 1996) and women were systematically barred from opportunities to work in the field (Rossiter, 1982). Many theories in psychology are based on male as norm and female as deviation from the norm (Fox Keller, 1996; Hyde, 1996). Researchers revised their interpretation of findings in order to match their theories, frequently documenting female inferiority (Matlin, 1996; Rossiter, 1982; Stepan, 1996). Women's experiences differ qualitatively from men's. Because topics relevant to women's lives were not deemed worthy of study, they became invisible. These experiences include menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, marital violence, and

achievement motivation in women (Hyde, 1996; Matlin, 1996; Unger & Crawford, 1996). A feminist psychology of women examines these topics in order to give voice to women's experiences. Since it is feminist in focus, it is activist in directing research to uncover the complex factors affecting women's lives and in attempts to advance social, political, economic and legal equality for women (Unger & Crawford, 1996). Science is never value neutral (Schiebinger, 1996; Unger & Crawford, 1996) and neither is feminist psychology.

Methodological Biases

Feminist psychologists would argue further that traditional psychology is androcentric not only in theory and in accumulated knowledge but also in research methodology. Bias can be found at many junctures and the feminist psychology attempts to correct these methodological flaws. The numerous ways in which bias can enter the research process has been described in detail (Fine, 1985; Grady, 1981; Hyde, 1996; Matlin, 1996; Unger & Crawford, 1996). Essentially, all research begins with theory or observation, proceeds to hypothesis formulation, experimental design, data collection and analysis, interpretation and publication of results and ends with incorporation of results into the body of scientific knowledge.

Gender bias can enter as theory directs the research and interpretation of results (e.g. Freudian theory). The kind of questions that are asked may be biased, such as examining the negative psychological effects of a mother's work on her children while ignoring any positive outcomes that might ensue and simultaneously ignoring the possible negative impact of father's commitment to work on children. The choice of research participants can further bias outcomes if the sample is not representative. Traditional psychology has

a long history of using white, middle-class, male college students as participants in studies, the results of which have been overgeneralized to be representative of human nature. Details of additional biases that can be found in the work of Hyde (1996) and Matlin (1996) are included in Appendices I and II.

Feminist psychologists have suggested several research alternatives which include a movement away from empirical research toward methods that provide some contextual validity to women's lives such as observation and interviews and an emphasis on topics previously neglected by traditional psychology.

The Themes Within the Psychology of Women and Gender

A survey of three widely used textbooks in this area (Hyde, 1996; Matlin, 1996; Unger & Crawford, 1996) reveals several themes that distinguish the research.

Theme One: Psychological gender differences are generally small and inconsistent.
Theme Two: People react differently to men and women.
Theme Three: Women are less visible than men in many important areas.
Theme Four: Women vary widely from one another.
(Matlin, 1996)

Theme One: Gender and Sex need to be differentiated
Theme Two: Language and Naming are sources of power
Theme Three: The diversity of women
Theme Four: Psychological research and social change
(Unger & Crawford, 1996)

Recurrent Themes rooted in history:
Male as normative
Feminine evil
Recurrent Themes rooted in modern science:
Gender similarities
The difference between theory and empirical evidence
The difference between traits and situational determinants of behavior
The female deficit model
The importance of values
(Hyde, 1996)

Feminist psychology represents an alternative approach to study of women - with a critical analysis of research methodology and an incorporation of topics and themes not represented in traditional psychology. It is an approach that values women and attempts to provide contextual validity to their lives. Within this approach, gender is seen as a lens or prism through which each person experiences her world. The psychology of gender examines the processes by which gender is constructed and how gender influences lives not only in the abstract but also in the everyday experiences of women and men. These processes are examined by the psychology of women literature; however, the negative effect of these processes on women remains a central theme. Courses in the psychology of women incorporate current analysis of psychological theory and research concerning women's lives and include expanded coverage of topics typically ignored or given cursory attention in traditional psychology classes. These topics include psychological theories of women's personality development, individual and societal influences on women's achievement and career development, women's experiences in the work environment, mothering and long-term relationships, the victimization of women and mental health issues.

Recommendation

In order to incorporate this new research and the recent critical analysis of methodology into the curriculum, a course in the psychology of women and gender should be added to the offerings in psychology departments at all undergraduate institutions. The psychology of women and gender is now an established discipline, with volumes of new research findings each year. Research in this area appears regularly in traditional journals

such as *American Psychologist, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology and Developmental Psychology* as well as in professional journals which focus entirely on the field, such as *Psychology of Women Quarterly, Feminism and Psychology, and Sex Roles*. This course has been approved and will be offered at Raritan Valley Community College during the Fall, 1997 semester. The psychology of women and gender will satisfy general education goals and will transfer easily.

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Rossiter, M.W. (1982). *Women scientists in America: Struggles and strategies to 1940.* Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

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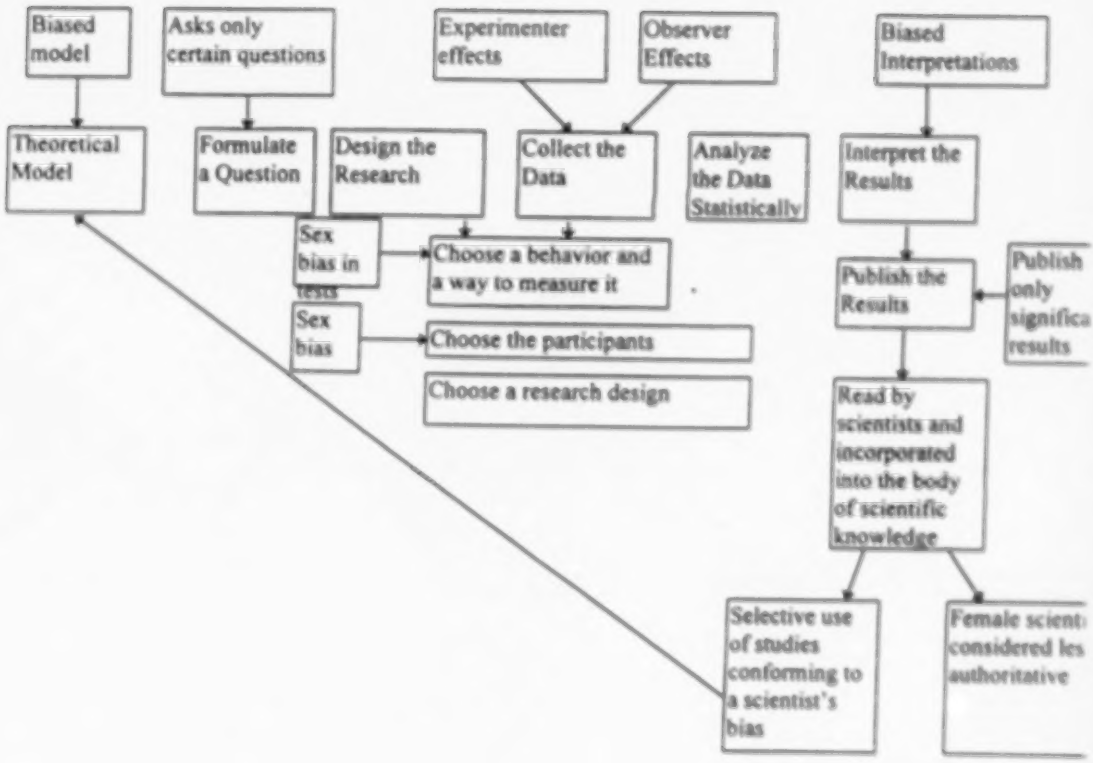
Unger, R. & Crawford, M. (1996). *Women and gender: A feminist psychology* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Appendix I


Biased model
Asks only certain questions
Experimenter effects
Observer Effects
Biased Interpretations
Theoretical Model
Formulate a Question
Design the Research
Collect the Data
Analyze the Data Statistically
Interpret the Results
Sex bias in tests
Choose a behavior and a way to measure it
Publish the Results
Publish only significa results
Sex bias
Choose the participants
Choose a research design
Read by scientists and incorporated into the body of scientific knowledge
Selective use of studies conforming to a scientist's bias
Female scient considered les authoritative

(Hyde, 1996)

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Appendix II

Stages at Which Biases Can Influence the Research Process

I. Formulating the hypothesis
   A. Using a biased theory
   B. Formulating a hypothesis on the basis of unrelated research
   C. Asking questions only from certain content areas
II. Designing the study
   A. Selecting the operational definitions
   B. Choosing the participants
   C. Choosing the experimenter
   D. Including confounding variables
III. Performing the study
   A. Influencing the outcome through experimenter expectancy
   B. Influencing the outcome through participants' expectancies
IV. Interpreting the data
   A. Emphasizing statistical significance rather than practical significance
   B. Ignoring alternate explanations
   C. Making inappropriate generalizations
   D. Supplying explanations that were not investigated in the study
V. Communicating the findings
   A. Leaving out analyses that show gender similarities
   B. Choosing a title that focuses on gender differences
   C. Journal editors rejecting studies that show gender similarities
   D. Secondary sources emphasizing gender differences instead of gender similarities

(Matlin, 1996)

Raritan Valley Community College

Academic Course Outline

I. **Basic Course Information:**

A. Course Number and Title: 83 - Psychology of Women and Gender

B. Date of Proposal or Revision: February 23, 1997

C. Sponsoring Department: Social Science

D. Semester Credit Hours: 3

E. Weekly Contact Hours:
Lecture: 3
Laboratory: 0

F. Prerequisites: Introduction to Psychology

G. Laboratory Fees: None

II. **Catalog Description:**

This course focuses on the research that expands current psychological theory concerning the lives of women, including such topics as theories of women's personality development, individual and societal factors affecting women's achievement and career choices, work and family experiences, and mental health status. Feminist psychologists' criticism of traditional psychology will be examined along with an analysis of psychology's construction of the female. The processes by which both girls and boys develop a sense of gender within our culture will be integrated throughout.

III. **Statement of Course Need:**

Courses in the Psychology of Women and/or the Psychology of Gender have become typical in the undergraduate psychology curriculums. A survey in 1991 of 503 psychology departments in the US revealed that 51% offered courses in the Psychology of Women. This course will examine topics that are usually given only cursory attention in other courses. It is important for students to understand that women's experiences are valuable and deserve to be studied in their own right. By understanding how gender influences the lives of both women and men, students will gain a broader perspective of psychology and the influences on their own lives. This course will provide students with a wider choice of courses when selecting a psychology and/or social science elective.

IV. **Place of Course in College Curriculum**:

A. Satisfies general education requirements

B. Can be taken as a free elective, a Social Science elective or a recommended elective, depending on the program.

C. See above

D. The Psychology of Women and /or Gender is a course that is offered at over 50% of the undergraduate colleges nationwide.

V. **General Education Goals**:

The course will meet the following general education goals:

1. To develop the ability to think critically
2. To develop the ability to communicate effectively
3. To collect, organize, and evaluate information to address different kinds of problems
4. To develop the ability to make informed judgments concerning ethical issues
5. To develop an understanding of fundamental principles, concepts, theoretical perspectives, and methods of the Social Sciences
6. To develop an understanding of diverse cultures
7. To develop an historical consciousness
8. To develop an understanding of health and well being

VI. **Student Learning Outcomes**:

As a result of this course students will be able to:

1. differentiate between sex and gender
2. understand the social and cultural processes by which gender is constructed
3. evaluate psychological research critically
4. understand that psychological gender differences are generally small and inconsistent
5. understand that women's experiences are qualitatively different than men's
6. recognize the larger context of women's lives
7. understand that women are diverse, reflecting differences in race, ethnicity, age and social class.

VI. **Suggested Materials**:

Unger, R. & Crawford, M. (1996). *Women and gender: A feminist psychology* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Crawford, M. & Unger, R. (Eds.) (1997). *In our own words: Readings on the psychology of women and gender*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

VII. **Outline of Course Content**:

1. Introduction to a Feminist Psychology of Women
   Text - Chapter One
   Reader - pp. 5 - 43
2. Approaches to Understanding Girls and Women
   Text - Chapter Two
   Reader - pp. 47 - 73
3. The Meanings of Difference: Sex, Gender, and Cognitive Abilities
   Text - Chapter Three
   Reader - pp. 135 - 144
4. Images of Women
   Text - Chapter Four
   Reader - pp. 119 - 134
5. Doing Gender: Sex, Status, and Power
   Text - Chapter Five
   Reader - pp. 96 - 107
6. Biological Aspects of Sex and Gender
   Text - Chapter Six
7. Becoming Gendered: Childhood
   Text - Chapter Seven
8. Becoming a Woman: Puberty and Adolescence
   Text - Chapter Eight
   Reader - pp. 74 - 94
9. Sex, Love, and Romance
   Text - Chapter Nine
10. Commitments: Women and Long-Term Relationships
    Text - Chapter Ten
11. Mothering
    Text - Chapter Eleven
    Reader - pp. 269 - 283
12. Work and Achievement
    Text - Chapter Twelve
    Reader - pp. 191 - 260
13. Midlife and Beyond
    Text - Chapter Thirteen

Reader - pp. 277 - 283

14. Violence Against Women
    Text - Chapter Fourteen
    Reader - pp. 152 - 164; 313 - 328
15. Gender and Psychological Disorders
    Text - Chapter Fifteen
    Reader - pp. 368 - 376